

Kindness & Sternness of God

Romans 11: 22-24

“²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!”

Kindness and sternness, seems somewhat ironic, doesn't it? How can someone demonstrate kindness and all that is entailed with that, and at the same time have sternness? I have found that in life, most parents are either extremely kind, toward their children, life and situations, or, they are extremely stern... There are a few in the middle, but not that many. It is rare that you find someone who discovers the balance of possessing both qualities in life.

In the last portion of chapter ten of Romans, and the first part of chapter 11, Paul talks a lot about the people of Israel, and their hard hearts and unreceptive manor. He speaks about the vast majority who turn their backs on God.

Paul says, *“**What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened,** ⁸ as it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day.” (7-8)*

So, what does the word *“stupor”* mean? It means: *“A state of near-unconsciousness or insensibility)* The definition is inferring a state where we are in a daze or nearly unconscious. Walking around doing and being someone, they were not created to do or be. Apparently, there was a chosen remnant of Jews who believed, who had obtained righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, yet, things were not going well. (vv.1-7) These were the people God said He foreknew of their choices in life (v.2). Those, God had expressed love toward, even before the world was aware of who He was or is. God foreknew those who would accept His love, His grace and forgiveness, despite their misunderstanding of how they are to live life.

What He was trying to say was, since He had foreknowledge, that they would accept His forgiveness, He also set out a course for them to follow, if they so desired. The problem often is, many do not follow His leading. Thus, those He foreknew, He predestined, He set out a course for their lives to follow. Not that He forced them to follow Him, as if they had no choice, they had to choose to follow Him, and if they did, He laid out a course in life for them to follow. It is this group of people that God calls the *“elect.”* He touched their hearts, changed their lives and now they have chosen to follow His leading as best as they can with His help.

So, what did Paul mean when he wrote to us this passage found in verses 7-8? I believe that He meant this, to those who accepted Jesus' forgiveness, the Word and teaching of Christ, came

salvation unto life. His Word brings life to our dead lives! But to those who rejected this, this becomes something so difficult, it is a stumbling stone unto death. These people find it difficult living life, doing whatever is best, and they don't understand why?

So, as he speaks of the *"spirit of stupor,"* that indicates the inability to think clearly, as if our minds are in a fog, or, half asleep, half awake. Indicating that those who are in this kind of condition, either don't see the necessity to do their duty unto God, or, Satan has caused them to fall asleep, so they are not paying attention to God. They just can't seem to sort it out in their own minds and hearts.

So, what happens next? The message which was brought to the Jews, with many of them rejecting it, causes the Lord to give this message to the Gentiles. This is why you and I are here today, and can REJOICE for what Jesus has done, and is doing for us.

However, let's keep in mind verse 11; *"¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? **Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.**"* I believe, that the Lord was hoping that once those unbelieving Jews saw the Gentiles accepting, growing, changing, and becoming His followers, they too would wake up and accept the truth. Why do I say this? He says plainly, they did not fall beyond recovery. That should be a hope to all of us who have loved ones who need Jesus!

Now, I have said all of this, to get to where I want to start today, with the message I feel the LORD placed upon my heart.

First - Two sides to God...

"²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off." In this passage, we see two side of god's mercy and grace...

1) We see a sternness...

If you are going to play games with God, you may well see that He is stern with those who fall away from Him. Just as a loving father might be, because he loves his children so much. Like our father's, God's love will go only so far. What do I mean by that thought? Paul says, He will return, regraft in, those who have rejected Him, once they turn over to their unbelieving hearts to Him, or, He will allow them to wallow in their own wickedness, by their own free will!

Jesus says in Matthew,

"This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand

with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." MAT 13:13-15 God is waiting to heal every one of us! Praise the Lord!

After we live in a bad place, long enough, where we are not listening to God as we should, our hearts become callous. In a sense, no more pain from the ugliness we have allowed within our hearts. We all know what a callous is, don't we?

Illustration:

Bowling, beginning get blisters on thumb. After a few weeks, a callous will form and you no longer feel the pain on that spot. The callous covers up the sensitivity, so there is no way to feel anything there.

What this means for us spiritually is, if we turn away from the Lord long enough, our hearts become callous, feeling nothing, listening to no one, and doing what we think we are supposed to do, or more likely, what we want to do. Just like the Jews did who were in a stupor. Dazed and unconscious when it came to the Lord.

However, there is a second side to God...

2) Kindness...

Listen to this, ***"Kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness...Otherwise, you too will be cut off..."*** (v.22) The kindness of God is ours, the full love, grace and goodness of God, as long as we, ***"continue in His kindness..."*** As long as we keep trying, stay the course, do our best. So, what does that tell us? We have a choice to make, all of us, as to which way we will live our lives. It's our choice. Remain in His kindness, or not? If not – then - ***"you too will be cut off..."*** Not by His choice, by ours.

Also keep in mind, who this is written to? In Rome, some of the believers were living their lives however they wanted to live. Thus, being cut off would imply, that we were at one time connected. We can't be cut off if we are not connected. Did you hear what Paul was saying, this applies to ***God's children, His followers, any one of us?*** Just as God is loving, and desires that we find, discover and know of His love, He is also stern. He has a plan in place for our lives. He balances His love for us, in a powerful way, so that we are not controlled by His leading. We must submit to His leading. Balance, that's what he is telling us about as he speaks speaks about sternness and kindness. Parents, are we listening? This applies to every one of us as well.

Illustration:

Ann Curry, a known news anchor of NBC's Today Show, writes a powerful thought concerning her father, in a book titled, ***"The Kindness of Strangers,"***

"Kindness has always mattered to our father. He taught us to honor people, and he has encouraged us since before I can remember, to empathize with human suffering. When I was a teenager, he'd say, 'Ann, go do something that helps people. Do something of service. It will always make you feel good about your life.'"

I shared this when I spoke about service a while back. However, it also speaks of kindness. Our God offers us kindness, to all people, His creation, not because we deserve it, but because He loves us. There is the key, ***kindness is offered in love.***

Second - Once we believe, we are grafted in...

“And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” (v.23) There is hope for those who were once a part, and have severed themselves from Him...

Before I speak about ***“grafting in”*** let me point out something. The word Paul uses at the end of this sentence, ***“again.”*** What that indicates to me is that ***“they”*** in this particular case the Jews who once did not believe, and now believe, were at one time a part of Him. They can't be grafted in, ***“again”*** unless they stop living in unbelief. At one point in time, they were ***“a part of Him”*** and they can return, if they start believing. ***As I stated, there is hope for those who have loved ones who have wondered.***

Oh so important to all of us, ***The Gentiles had been given the privilege to be “grafted in” to the vine, along with all of the other branches*** (v.17-18).

“¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches.”: Listen closely....

Just like us, who are right now a part of God's church, not because of earthly leaders saying we are, ***“O.K., we are an accept part.”*** We are part of His church, because God has ***“grafted us in.”*** He brings us into His church. And we are told here, He can and does regraft in those who for a season have fallen away. When they chose to be grafted in.

Illustration:

Tree in backyard in Spokane. Two different fruits. Peach tree and a pear tree.... I grafted one branch to see if it would grow. Eventually, it did. I cut a branch off the pear tree, cut a slice in the peach tree, slide it in, wrapped the bark around it, and then put a band aid on it, little salve, and prayed.

Didn't want to get in trouble for playing with Dad's trees, so I didn't tell him until, I knew it worked. And it did work!

In the same way, you and I have been attached to the Vine, and now we can do as he created us to do. We can live our lives as he guides us finding answers and understanding, because now we have discovered God's grace. Paul talked about a branch being grafted into the Olive Tree...

Here is a thought, ***“Man grafts to mend trees, God grafts to mend branches.” (repeat)***

When we are ***“graphed in”*** to the Olive Tree, God, we are being grafted into the good Olive Tree, and thus, we can partake of the His roots, and His substance, THE Tree. Living Water and Grace to carry us through. Being attached to Him, we can draw from God's strength, His living

water, His nutrients, so that we might find power to become what He created us to become. When we choose to separate ourselves, we lose that strength and power.

Paul indicates that during that time, while separated from God, we are living in the world and not Him. That is a time when we are not attached to a good Olive Tree, we are just a broken branch laying on the ground, waiting to die. We all have seen dead branches laying on the ground.

But ***“Praise be to God,”*** He takes that branch which has fallen to the ground, and grafts it to the ***“cultivated Olive Tree,”*** Himself, to revive the branch, not matter the cost to the Olive Tree. ***“Men grafts to mend trees, God grafts to mend branches.” (repeat it again)***

When God opens the door for us to enter, we need to enter. We should fall on our faces before Him, allowing His Grace to cover and fills us, following Him willingly. Why? Because He opened that door so that we might be mended, healed. In this case, Dad won't get mad, He wants us to be grafted to Him.

Third - What is our response?

I was afraid that that small branch I grafted wouldn't make it. Isn't that human nature, to doubt! In spite of me, it did make it! When the graft takes, then what are we to do? Like Jesus, we might show everyone the scares, and tell them, I had fallen, and now, I am a part of Him, His church, His body, ***I am a child of the King!***

Paul spoke bluntly in verses 19- 20,

*“You will say then, Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. Granted. But they were broken off **(listen now)** because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, (meaning the Jews) He will not spare you either.”* Do not get boastful to others...

When you know that God has spoken to you, and that He has grafted you in, then act, live and surrender to His will, His love, His life for us, daily. ***Live for Christ with intension***, so that others can see it. So, they know, that if He can graft us in, they can be grafted in as well. Do not be so arrogant to think you are the only one, or, that it stops with you.

What should be our response? It should be one of rejoicing, of shouting it out, of joy within our hearts and souls. Let everyone know He is waiting to graft them in as well...

There are several things that are part of this grafted life we need to consider:

1) That we live what we are proclaiming

God is not pleased when we go right back into the world, and start doing what we have always done. Lean on Him. Live for Him!

2) That we continue to grow, daily, and never stop the grafting process.

That branch I grafted to the fruit tree, kept getting larger, stronger and until one day it bore fruit. The Lord expects us, once we are grafted, to be the same way. Bearing fruit.

3) That means proclaiming to others what God has done, and is doing.

One of the main reasons many stop proclaiming to others the message of God's love, is there is nothing happening in their own walk any longer, so, there is nothing to proclaim? ***Growth is natural to all living organisms. If we are not growing, we are dying.*** A dying branch gets pruned for the new grafting to take place. ***(Dead branches sap just as much as live branches)***

Isn't that just what Paul said, and why they are pruned, because they are dead in their unbelief. If that doesn't speak to us, in some way, what will? Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, ***"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this, in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."*** COL 1:9-10

God never intended for us to stop growing. So, what is our response to His message?

- Two sides to God, sternness and kindness
- Once we believe, we are grafted in - that means we can tap into His roots, His power and presence
- Then, the question comes, what is our response? Continued growth and fruit bearing, or cut off to make room for another future grafting?

This depends upon us...

I believe there are people are waiting to hear about your being grafted in...

Not drafted... Grafted...

Once we are grafted in – we profess it to others...

Communion: